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THE EGYPTIAN MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND THE SOUTH SUDAN QUESTION: RECONSIDERING MODERATION

The South Sudanese struggle for independence (1955-2011) was one of the more debated post-colonial liberation wars. Not only did it challenge the sanctity of post-colonial borders, but it also had the potential to destabilize regional geopolitics, as South Sudan lies on major water sources and oil reserves. Consequently, while the South Sudanese separatists gained support from some African governments, many other regional actors opposed their demand for independence.

One of the fiercest opponents of South Sudanese independence was the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB).¹ Whilst the MB was not unique in opposing South Sudanese independence, it became one of the most persistent voices against it. A closer look at the MB's stand on the South Sudan issue reveals an interesting fact; while the movement remained consistent in opposing South Sudanese independence, the way it justified this position changed during the years. Throughout the first decades of the war (1960s-1990s) the MB based its objection to South Sudanese independence (or even autonomy) primarily on religious or sectarian grounds, portraying the South Sudanese uprising as a Christian movement manipulated by the West, the churches and the mission to eradicate Islam in Africa. This changed in the decade preceding South Sudanese independence. The MB continued to resist South Sudan's breakaway. Only now, the movement based its formal objection on practical grounds. Its literature moved to highlight the South Sudanese leadership's undemocratic nature and lack of administrative experience, portraying an independent South Sudan as yet another failed state.

This article examines this transition. The purpose here is not simply to narrate the MB's agenda. Rather, this it is to contribute to the ongoing debate over the movement's nature, and

especially its claims to moderation. Whereas the previous decade witnessed a tendency in the scholarship to describe the movement as having moderated, recent works have challenged this hypothesis. This article joins this latter body of work. It uses this particular case-study to demonstrate that even though the MB has indeed gone through some metamorphosis, we should be cautious about defining it as moderation.

Admittedly, the South Sudan question may seem esoteric in comparison to other questions that have preoccupied the MB. Certainly, the issues of Israel/Palestine or Western presence in the Middle East have played far greater role on the MB's agenda. This notwithstanding, the South Sudan question featured heavily in the MB's media outlets, which indicates its importance for the movement's leadership. Moreover, this apparent esotericism actually makes it an appealing case. It means that with regard to South Sudan the MB was mostly free of the constraints that characterized other issues. Therefore, we can assume that ideology played a much bigger role in shaping the MB's agenda in this case.

This research relies on an analysis of a range of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include books written by leading MB thinkers and scholars; the movement's media outlets, such as the Cairo-based *al-Da'wa* (the Call) and *Liwa' al-Islam* (the Banner of Islam), as well as the London-based student journal *Sawt al-Ghoraba* (the Foreigners' Voice); and, for later periods, the MB's official website, *Ikhwan Online*. Analysing the MB's agenda requires some great caution, since the movement is far from being a monolith.² The MB developed throughout the years a pluralist structure and flexible hierarchy. This has enabled its survival amid government repression, but also resulted in inter-generational and ideological contestations within the movement.³ Primary sources do not always reflect these inner tensions. Secondary sources, although providing essential background information, may use primary sources selectively and deliver a biased image of the movement and its ideology. To mitigate this challenge, I have taken great care in assessing the secondary sources, comparing them to

primary sources and other works. The journals, magazines and books used for this research have all addressed the MB's 'target audience', namely young educated students and professionals. Even if they do not always expose the tensions between the different camps within the movement, they do present the general message the movement has tried to convey.

The article begins by defining moderation and examining the debate over the MB's moderation. The following section discusses the general attitudes toward the South Sudan secessionist struggle in the Middle East. It pays some special attention to Egypt's official stand. A key regional actor, Cairo traditionally resisted South Sudanese secession and even aided Khartoum in its counter-insurgency efforts. Yet, at later stages of the war, Cairo ended up revising its stand. This helps to contextualize my argument: the South Sudan question exposes the MB's immoderation not because of its objection itself, but because it refused to revise its position even when other actors involved did. The final section examines the MB's approach to the South Sudan question, from the 1960s and until the end of the MB's brief spell in power in 2013.

Moderation and the MB

Much like concepts such as radicalism or extremism, the meaning of moderation often depends on those employing it. In the case of this article, what makes the discussion on moderation relevant is the fact that the MB has portrayed itself to have gone a process of moderation. But what does moderation actually mean in politics? Joel Olson has pointed out that social theory generally views the moderate as one that 'asserts that the essence of politics is not conflict between friends and enemies but reasonable compromise to avoid extremes and maintain the ship of state'.⁴ Concentrating on Islamism in Yemen and Jordan, Jillian Schwedler defines

moderation as ‘movement from a relatively closed and rigid worldview to one more open and tolerant of alternative perspectives’.⁵

The above two definitions correlate with the MB’s self-portrayal in recent years. Already during the 1970s the movement’s leadership proclaimed to embody moderate Islam in that, unlike other Egyptian Islamist movements, for example *al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Group), it renounced the use of violence as means of achieving its social and political goals.⁶ Gradually, the movement refined this definition. During the 1990s, a new generation of activists gained prominence within the movement, labelled by Mona El-Ghobashy as the ‘middle-aged generation’.⁷ This generation was composed primarily of the student activists of the 1960s-1970s. These activists, who began filling mid- and top-level positions in the movement during the late 1980s, had a history of collaboration with other political movements in Egypt, including the *Wafd*, Labour and Liberal parties. Reaching positions of influence, they approached to reform the movement. They drafted a new platform that underlined democracy and the rule of law as the only legitimate means of reforming state and society. It also advanced equality for women and non-Muslims (especially the Coptic minority). In 2005 this became the MB’s official programme for the national elections.⁸ Thus, the MB set its own standards for moderation. This resulted from the MB’s integration into the broader political system in Egypt and interaction with other parties.⁹ More relevant to this article’s purpose, the MB’s presentation of these reforms as moderation indicated that the movement’s leadership also understood moderation as the willingness to compromise and revise past convictions.

Students of political Islam embraced the MB’s new image. Mona El-Ghobashey has maintained that the MB ‘has morphed from a highly secretive, hierarchical, antidemocratic organization led by anointed elders into a modern, multivocal political association steered by educated, savvy professionals not unlike activists of the same age in rival Egyptian political parties’.¹⁰ Omar Ashour has used the MB as an exemplary ‘deradicalized’ Islamist movement

that abandoned political violence in favour of electoral democracy and ‘political and ideological pluralism’.¹¹ The fact that the MB was condemned for its policies by other Islamist movements bolstered its moderate image.¹² This interest in the MB’s moderation stemmed from several factors. The MB’s transition came after September 11, at a time when civilizational conflict seemed imminent.¹³ Furthermore, the focus on the MB’s moderation correlated with the broader interest in deradicalization within the social sciences, which also looked into reforms in Catholic or socialist movements. This trend gave birth to the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, according to which the inclusion of radical actors in political systems could result in their gradual moderation. Describing the MB as having gone a process of moderation seemed to validate this theory.¹⁴

Most of the work on the MB’s moderation focused on its domestic agenda. This was not coincidental - the bulk of the movement’s activism concentrated on domestic reforms. This notwithstanding, international politics has been an inseparable aspect of the MB’s activism. Viewing the Islamic *umma* (community of believers) as a single unit, the movement took great interest in Muslim communities across the globe. The most burning international issues on the MB’s agenda have been the Israel/Palestine question and the Muslim World’s relations with the West. On both issues the MB traditionally took hard-line positions. It generally rejected normalization with Israel and led the opposition to the Camp David peace. It has often expressed hostility toward what it perceived as Western, and especially American, hegemonic aspirations in the region. The MB has seemed to be less divided on foreign affairs than around domestic affairs. This is because the movement generally believed that rather than calling for the overthrow of the government due to its foreign policies, it could actually pressure Cairo into taking action, and especially waging *jihad* (violent and non-violent). Subsequently, at least in terms of foreign policy the MB tried to operate through the government.¹⁵

Given this, several works have suggested that the MB could be perceived as a moderate on international affairs as well. Robert Leiken and Steven Brooke have claimed that the MB has come to rethink its traditional antipathy toward Israel. As they have noted, ‘Every Muslim Brotherhood leader with whom we spoke claimed a willingness to follow suit should Hamas – the Palestinian offshoot of the Brotherhood – recognize the Jewish state’.¹⁶ Marc Lynch’s analysis of the MB’s relations with the West presents a more complex take on the moderation hypothesis. Lynch defines moderation ‘in terms of a communicative orientation rather than in terms of particular political positions’.¹⁷ According to Lynch an indication for the MB’s moderation has been its willingness to engage in communicative action and dialogue with the West. Unlike strategic action, Lynch suggests, communicative action ‘requires speakers to make their own ideas, interests and even identities open to challenge in public debate’.¹⁸ Often in the past, Islamists have taken ‘a strategic approach to dialogue, one which seeks to change the other without putting its own views into question’.¹⁹ The atmosphere following the September 11 attacks incentivized Islamist thinkers to adopt a different attitude and engage in communicative action. The need to overcome the tragedy and the ensuing sense of distrust created the necessary public spheres for such engagement. Lynch uses the example of Yusuf al-Qaradawi. A popular theologian associated with the MB, Qaradawi has been perceived in the West as an extremist, partly because of his refusal to condemn suicide attacks against Israeli civilians or foreign forces in the Middle East. Nonetheless, Lynch documents that following the September 11 attacks Qaradawi has frequently advocated an open and genuine dialogue with the West, on the condition of Western reciprocity.²⁰

The hypothesis about the MB’s moderation has come under considerable criticism in recent studies. These works have illustrated that the MB failed to meet its own standards of moderation. According to Katerina Dalacoura, although the movement committed itself to the electoral process, it ‘has made the least progress towards moderate positions on social issues’

in comparison to other, even Islamist, movements.²¹ In contrast to their declarations, the MB's leadership, including the middle-aged leaders, did not take tangible measures toward equal representation for women and non-Muslims. In contradiction of its advocacy of free speech, Dalacoura shows, the MB acted to censor scholarly or literary works deemed offensive to Islam, sometimes in collaboration with the government.²² Even the MB's commitment to the electoral process remained partial. In contrast to the reformists' public endorsement of the electoral process, conservative circles within the movement kept viewing democracy as merely a way of replacing the Egyptian government. Some of these conservatives refused to use the term 'democracy', believing that sovereignty lies only within God and not the people.²³

Neither of these works has denied that the MB has transformed throughout the decades. But they have questioned whether this could be described as moderation. As Dalacoura puts it, 'If moderation is always a relative concept, the Brotherhood is clearly "moderate" in an Egypt which has become increasingly conservative and religious-minded over the last few decades'.²⁴ However, this process has far from a linear progress toward liberalism, but rather 'a path marked by profound inconsistencies and contradictions, yielding agendas in which newly embraced themes of freedom and democracy coexist uneasily with illiberal religious concepts carried over from the past'.²⁵ This could be partly blamed on the movement's own fragmented nature.²⁶ Yet, ambivalence toward democracy has also appeared among middle-aged reformers.²⁷

The rest of this article seeks to support this critique of the moderation hypothesis. It does so by focusing on the MB's foreign policy stands rather than domestic agenda. Foreign policy involves dynamics, incentives and motivations different than those relating to domestic politics. The fact that the MB may have toned down on occasions its attacks on Egypt's relations with Israel or the West did not signify a meaningful change, but acknowledgement of some need to display ambiguity. In other instances, and the South Sudan question is one such

case, there was not even need for such ambiguity. Looking into these dynamics can provide us with more comprehensive insights into the limitations of the moderation hypothesis.

South Sudan in the Context of Regional Geopolitics

The MB's policy toward the South Sudan question did not evolve in a vacuum, but within the broader context of regional and international politics. The roots of the war in Sudan date to the process of decolonization. Independent Sudan was a consensual union of the South, whose population was predominantly black and practiced Christianity or shamanistic religions, and the mostly Arab-Muslim North. Toward independence, the government in Khartoum, which was almost exclusively Arab and Muslim, launched a Sudanization programme. Officially this meant the replacement of colonial civil servants with native ones. In practice, Sudanization meant the Arabization and Islamization of the whole of Sudan. Knowledge of Arabic became a precondition for government employment, which excluded the Southerners who gained their education at mission schools. Disillusioned with their prospects of integration in the new state, South Sudanese intellectuals, civil servants, teachers and soldiers began rising against Khartoum's rule. Sporadic uprisings and clashes that erupted in the mid-1950s escalated into a full-scale civil war in the early 1960s, with the South Sudanese leadership now demanding independence.

Throughout the war, the South Sudanese militia, the Anyanya, inflicted heavy casualties among the Northern security forces in an intense guerrilla warfare. In 1969 the Sudanese elected government was overthrown in a military coup. Sudan's new president, Ga'afar al-Nimeiri, changed Khartoum's policy and engaged in peace talks with the rebel leader, Joseph Lagu. In 1972 both parties signed the Addis Ababa Agreement. This agreement granted South Sudan wide autonomy and incorporated the rebels into the Sudanese state and

army. In 1983 this agreement collapsed and the war resumed. One of the main reasons for that was Nimeiri's decision in 1976 to implement shari'a as a source of legislation across Sudan, including the South. This decision was partly inspired by his political alliance with the Sudanese MB and its leader, the jurist Hassan al-Turabi. While this decision had little to do with the Egyptian MB, the latter warmly welcomed it as an example for other governments. The MB's Cairo-based al-Da'wa magazine described Sudan as 'an exemplary beacon to be followed'.²⁸

The new round of war saw the formation of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The SPLM/A's leader, John Garang, revoked the Southern quest for independence. Instead he demanded the democratization and secularization of a federal Sudan. Nimeiri was toppled in 1985 and replaced by a democratically-elected government, which tried to reach an understanding with Garang. But in June 1989 this government was overthrown in another military coup. Sudan's new ruler, Brigadier General Omar Hassan al-Bashir, allied with Turabi and formed the National Congress Party (NCP). The NCP government advanced the implementation of shari'a in Sudan. The war continued until 2005 when Bashir, now alienated from Turabi, renewed contacts with Garang. Both parties signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This agreement established a regional autonomous government in South Sudan and determined that a referendum on Southern independence was to be held in January 2011. In the referendum a vast majority of the Southerners voted for independence. On the 9th of July 2011 the Republic of South Sudan was declared. Khartoum was the first to recognize the new state and establish diplomatic relations with it.

The South Sudanese struggle triggered Arab antagonism. Egypt in particular was anxious about any change in South Sudan's status. South Sudanese secession threatened the post-colonial normative order that sanctified colonial borders. Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's

president, avowed that ‘We object to the imperialist intervention in southern Sudan, which aims to encourage its secession from the rest of Sudan... The breakup of southern Sudan will dramatically decrease Sudan’s influence in Africa, which is what the imperialists aspire to’.²⁹ However, Egypt had more practical reasons to worry about South Sudanese independence. The White Nile, one of the Nile’s two main tributaries, runs through Sudan. Cairo and Khartoum established stable working relations around the use of the Nile water.³⁰ Nevertheless, this arrangement faced constant contestations from other states in the Nile Basin, and especially Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania. Cairo worried that any change in regional geopolitics could risk its water supply.³¹ Throughout the conflict, Egypt pursued the line dictated by Nasser of objecting South Sudanese independence. Even in 1984 Cairo’s formal position was that ‘Egypt rejects the secession of southern Sudan, as all these partition plans are bound to encourage divisive schemes in the Middle East, undermine stability and allow self-interests that are based on foreign plans to gain the upper-hand’.³² Cairo’s support of Khartoum was not simply symbolic or political. Together with Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Libya, Egypt sent military aid to the Sudanese government, which included the provision of both arms and training.³³ Other Arab governments also expressed their objection to South Sudanese secession. The Ba’ath regime in Iraq, for instance, condemned Khartoum’s attempts to reach a compromise with the South, warning that ‘Closing this gate [to Africa] would threaten not only Sudan’s integrity, but the security of the entire Arab world’.³⁴

The idea of Sudan as a gate to Africa echoed in the Islamist discourse about the country. The MB has seen Islamization as a civilizing mission. It too viewed Sudan as a gate to spreading Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁵ Mohammed Mahmud Ghali, a scholar at al-Azhar University and a veteran MB activist, wrote that ‘Africa south of the Sahara remained untouched by global civilization for centuries. The blame is on Arab Africa, which was keener on transferring its civilization to Europe and ignored Africa south of the Sahara’. The world,

he continued, 'would have been a different place had Arab Africa not forgotten about the continent surrounding it and its brothers to the south'.³⁶ The solution according to Ghali was to spread Islam in the continent.³⁷ This notion paved the way to an intense MB's campaign against the South Sudanese rebels.

The MB and the South Sudan Question

The 1960s-1980s: Crusaders, missionaries and Christian conspiracies

One of the first in the MB to pay attention to events in Sudan was Sayyid Qutb, one of the movement's most notable theoreticians. Perceiving the MB as spearheading a universal Islamic revolution to eliminate the Western-imposed nation state, Qutb advanced during the 1960s the idea of an Islamic civilizing mission in Africa. In his work *Ma'alim fi-l-Tariq* (Milestones), which outlined his programme to apply the shari'a in modern state legislation, Qutb stated that:

When Islam entered the centre of Africa, it clothed naked human beings, socialized them, brought them out of the deep recesses of isolation, and taught them the joy of work for exploring material resources. It brought them out of the narrow circles of tribe and clan into the vast circle of the Islamic community, and out of the worship of pagan gods into the worship of the Creator of the worlds. If this is not civilization, then what is it?³⁸

Qutb referred to the Sudan war as a civilizational war between Islam and Christianity. He identified the South Sudanese liberation movement as part of a Christian-missionary conspiracy. In his interpretation of the Quran, *fi zilal al-Quarn* (in the Shade of the Quran), Qutb maintained that Christian hostility to Islam 'has never ended'. Counting Christian attacks on Muslim targets during the 1960s, Qutb stated that 'indeed we need go no further than what the Christian missionaries have been trying to do in the south of the Sudan'.³⁹

The idea of Southern secession as a missionary conspiracy recurred in the MB literature during the 1970s. Shortly after the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, an article in the MB's London-based journal *Sawt al-Ghoraba* questioned the legitimacy of the agreement, claiming that the talks took place 'under the auspices of the World Council of Churches' and that representatives of the Catholic Church and Western organizations participated in them.⁴⁰ In a following issue, the magazine claimed to expose the 'hidden hand behind the curtain' in Sudan. This article blamed nameless missionary organizations for instigating instability in South Sudan, claiming that the scope of relations between missionaries and the rebels was greater than initially assumed. It then professed that the missionaries were seeking to 'Christianize the South entirely'. Hence, the article continued, 'we can witness the scope of the calamity of the compromises that the Sudanese government made with the Christian missionaries'.⁴¹ Another commentary, entitled 'the mission and terror in Sudan', blamed Nimeiri for signing the Addis Ababa Agreement out of a desire to ally with Christian organizations in order to save his power.⁴²

This outlook on the South Sudan issue survived well after the collapse of the Addis Ababa Agreement and Nimeiri's downfall. When the interim government that replaced Nimeiri initiated talks with the SPLM/A, al-Da'wa warned of the 'Crusaders' attack' on Sudan, alluding to the SPLM/A.⁴³ The SPLM/A and Garang employed mainly a Marxist terminology, at least partly in order to please their patron, the Marxist Derg regime in Ethiopia. Moreover, up until the early 2000s the SPLM/A advocated a united and democratic Sudan, rather than a secessionist agenda. This did not prevent the MB from continuously referring to the Southern insurgents and their leader as 'Christian'. One al-Da'wa report discussed the 'Christian John Garang' and asserted that 'it is well known that John Garang's movement is a Christian one, aiming to separate the South from the rest of Sudan and turn it into a Christian enclave'.⁴⁴ Southern insurgency was described as 'the strikes of the Christian minority in the South'.⁴⁵

The 1989 coup and the ascent of the NCP government in Khartoum intensified these attacks. As the South Sudanese rebels presented their demands to the new government, Liwa' al-Islam, another MB monthly printed in Cairo, recounted that 'the South Sudanese fanatic John Garang exposed his ambitions. Unsurprisingly, he still receives international aid from the churches, as well as both capitalist and communist states'. The report protested against Garang's demand to 'take part in ruling the whole of Sudan through participating in the government' and to 'rebuild the army in order to integrate rebel soldiers'.⁴⁶ A following issue quoted the al-Azhar scholar Abdel Wadoud Shalabi's statement that

The South Sudan problem has been caused mainly by the global mission. The churches have a fundamental role in stirring enmity and war. The fanatic West and the Communist East are also behind the rebel John Garang, providing him with money and arms... the global powers that conspire against Islam use the rebel movement they sponsor to abolish the Islamic shari'a in Sudan.⁴⁷

This treatment of the South Sudanese rebellion continued well into the 1990s. In his 1990 delineation of the 'priorities of the Islamic Movement in the coming phase', Qaradawi referred several times to the war in Sudan as a key subject in Islam's relations with the West. He maintained that '[Western] thought and perception of us [the Muslims] is still inspired by... the spirit of the crusaders... as could be seen in its attitude toward the issues of southern Sudan, Eritrea, Kashmir, the Philippines and other issues of relevance to political Islam'.⁴⁸ Elsewhere in the book Qaradawi declared that a condition for any Muslim-Christian dialogue is that 'the Church ceases to aid the Christians against the Muslims in every conflict, such as the ones in southern Sudan, the Philippines and others'.⁴⁹

Some of the MB's allegations were not necessarily false, but rather grossly distorted. True, the South Sudanese won the sympathy of the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (WCC). Nonetheless, these bodies' intervention in the conflict was limited. The

WCC did mediate between Nimeiri and Lagu, but it was one among other actors, including the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the MB overlooked the fact that, especially after 1983, the Southern insurgents had a large Muslim following, especially in the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile. Although the majority of Nuba are Muslims, al-Da'wa chose to emphasize the role of a Nubian Episcopal priest, Father Philip Abbas Ghaboush, in orchestrating the 'racist rebellion' and 'conspiracy' against Sudan.⁵¹

One may point out the general antipathy toward secession in the post-colonial era as shaping the MB's outlook of events in Sudan. Yet, this was not the case. The MB never sanctified the post-colonial borders. In its earlier decades the movement actually rejected this territorial division within the Muslim World. In other cases it expressed support of Muslim separatist movements in post-colonial states, including Eritrea, the Philippines, Thailand or Kashmir.⁵² Mustafa Mashhur, later to become the MB's *al-murshid al-'am* (Supreme Guide), wrote in 1986 that 'The problems of the Islamic world, such as [in]... Eritrea or the Philippines... are not problems of land and peoples... but of Islam and the Muslims, and they can be resolved by neither negotiations nor recognition of the enemy's right to the Islamic land he stole'.⁵³ It was perhaps this Islamist antagonism toward the idea of a non-Muslim rule over Muslims that shaped the MB's perceptions. In this fashion, Muhammad al-Sawi, another prominent thinker associated with the MB, argued in 1992 that non-Muslims cannot obtain sovereignty over Muslims.⁵⁴ Having been subjected to Khartoum's rule for nearly two centuries, South Sudan could not be allowed to reverse this reality.⁵⁵ The 2000s, nonetheless, triggered changes in both Sudanese politics and the MB discourse on the subject.

The MB and Post-CPA South Sudan

After some military setbacks during the 1990s, the SPLM/A recuperated during the early 2000s. Its well-orchestrated campaign eventually drove Bashir to initiate the CPA. The change in Sudan, and especially in the NCP government's position, drove other neighbouring governments to reassess their position on the South Sudan question. Most notable was Egypt under Hosni Mubarak's presidency that 'accepted the fact that [South Sudanese] independence was inevitable'.⁵⁶ This was a gradual process and during the CPA Cairo remained alert.⁵⁷ But in June 2011, the semi-official *al-Ahram* newspaper published an article reassuring the readers that Egypt will not face any risk to its water supply from geopolitical changes at the Nile Basin. It confirmed that 'an increase in Egypt's share of the Nile water relies on the stability and security of the states on the sources of Nile, and especially South Sudan'.⁵⁸ Symbolically, Egypt was the second state, after Sudan, to recognize the Republic of South Sudan. On the referendum day, *al-Ahram* conveyed the SPLM/A's message that 'we will not be part of any hostility against the Arab states'.⁵⁹ The provisional Egyptian government under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces committed to cooperate with the new state and help it develop its infrastructure.

Amid these developments, the MB resumed its attacks against South Sudanese secession. During this period the MB's discourse began changing, moving to justify its opposition to South Sudanese secession by referring to practical grounds. Instead of describing the South Sudanese struggle for independence as a Christian conspiracy against Islam, MB outlets moved to highlight the non-democratic nature of the Southern leadership and the economic unviability of the landlocked South Sudanese state. They also portrayed South Sudan as a hub of ethnic conflicts, whose endemic violence and instability could project on the entire region, including Egypt. One of the first articles on Ikhwan Online concerning South Sudan told the readers that the post-CPA South Sudanese authorities were embezzling oil income:

Whilst some members of the Southern movements accuse the North of stealing the Southern share of oil income, the figures show that the Southerners have received three billion dollars out of a gross income of eleven billion dollars... Southerners who had returned [from the North] to the South found nothing and returned to the North... Every Sudanese now asks where have the 3 billion gone?⁶⁰

Other reports aimed to demonstrate that the South Sudanese leadership could not control outbursts of violence.⁶¹ One of these reports quoted a NCP member of parliament saying that ‘the South is trying to cover up its security shortcomings’.⁶² Another report stated that

Local officials and residents warned of an escalation in tribal feuds in the South, because of the SPLM’s failure to provide the population with basic food and security and to solve the tribal disputes over grazing land, cattle, and water sources. This indicates the [local population’s] fears of South Sudan’s fate under an independent Southern administration.⁶³

The MB also blamed the South Sudanese leadership of systematically persecuting the Muslim minority in the South. Ikhwan Online reported that following the CPA, Southern Muslims felt ‘marginalized by the government in Khartoum in the North and by the SPLM that rules the South’. It added that they ‘are now facing ruthless Christianization campaigns and periods of political and religious persecution’.⁶⁴ The website quoted Abdel Rahim Ali, a member of the NCP’s Executive Leadership, asserting that ‘Secession would mean new problems instead of the old ones. The border between the South and the North will become more dangerous, and there will be a war between the Southern tribes on the North’s southern borders’. He added that

The Southerners do not have political experience that allows them to build a state. This has been confirmed by a number of international observers. The Southern citizens have lived since independence under Northern administration, while the Southern leaders had been preoccupied with military action and guerrilla war. When the CPA was signed, the leadership of the South fell into the hands of guerrilla leaders... who discovered that state-building is a completely different thing.⁶⁵

This line of argument became popular especially among the MB's middle-aged leaders. A notable commentator on the South Sudan issue was Essam el-Erian, then a member of parliament for the MB bloc and of the movement's Guidance Bureau.⁶⁶ Commenting on the CPA, Erian wrote that the SPLM/A 'is objected by other Southern movements and does not represent the majority of people and tribes in the South'. South Sudanese independence, Erian warned, would result in tribal feuds in the South, war with the North and a refugee crisis.⁶⁷ Osama Gado, a MB member of parliament from Alexandria, cautioned that South Sudan 'is Egypt's strategic depth' and that its secession would constitute a 'threat to Egypt's water sources, as it would put Nile water at the hands of the rebels'.⁶⁸ Khaled Ouda, a geologist described as 'one of the MB's leaders in the Asyut Province', alerted Ikhwan Online's readers that 'Egypt is most likely to be affected by the dangers of draught and desertification if secession is to occur'.⁶⁹

This change of discourse reflected the transition in the MB's perception of domestic politics. On the surface, the MB applied to the South Sudan question the same standards it claimed to adhere to at home. Again, the MB's description of the reality in South Sudan was not entirely exaggerated. Ethnic violence has been endemic in South Sudan and the local leadership often proved unable or unwilling to uproot this phenomenon. But in reality, violence and human rights violations did not prevent the MB from supporting other liberation movements. The Muslim liberation movements in Eritrea and the Philippines have already been

mentioned. To this one can add the MB's support of Palestinian Hamas, which has displayed authoritarian tendencies since taking over the Gaza Strip in 2006.⁷⁰ This is not to criticize the MB for practicing *realpolitik*, but to prove that these moral considerations did not play a significant role in the MB's perception of international affairs. Of course, practicing *realpolitik* does not render the MB immoderate or extremist. Neither is the use of a certain discourse. It is the fact that in the case of South Sudan the MB actually did not practice *realpolitik*. In spite of a rapidly changing reality, the MB refused to revise its policies. Even after Sudan, Egypt and other OAU members accepted South Sudan's secession, thus taking the edge off the apocalyptic description of South Sudan's secession as a security catastrophe, the MB stuck to its position of objecting any change to the existing status quo.

The practical discourse, then, did not genuinely reflect the MB's view of the South Sudan issue. If geopolitical considerations and fears for South Sudan's political nature cannot explain the MB's stand, what other explanations remain? One potential explanation may relate to the MB's desire to protect its reputation. As an opposition movement aiming to lead the Egyptian public, reputation has been one of the MB's most important resources. Indeed, works on community politics have highlighted the function of reputation as a resource of local politicians, especially in the opposition.⁷¹ For the MB, similarly to other Islamist movements, 'resistance to foreign domination of Muslim lands and people' has been an important source of legitimacy and credibility.⁷² Based on this logic, one could suspect that the MB leadership may have worried that compromising on South Sudan may risk their image as fighting for the global Islamic cause, and undermine their ability of protecting more burning issues, such as that of Palestine. The MB's history, nonetheless, invalidates this counterfactual. After all, the MB did not hesitate to declare (even if not fully implement) reforms in its conduct in domestic politics which led to its integration in Egyptian national politics. This even though this move triggered harsh criticism by other Islamist movements.

If we accept that practical considerations did not actually guide the MB's stand, then we are left with an ideological explanation, namely that the same religiously-infused logic continued to guide the MB's approach to the South Sudan question, in spite of the change in rhetoric. This assertion is buttressed by the fact that as South Sudanese independence became imminent, the more conservative sectarian discourse reappeared. Qaradawi, for example, was cited by Ikhwan Online as calling for 'resistance to the missionary campaign that the West leads throughout the Muslim states, and especially in South Sudan'. He blamed this intervention with 'hindering the spread of Islamic awakening among Muslims'.⁷³ He then concluded:

The South Sudan subject is not a question of civil war, but a global conspiracy to marginalize Arabism and Islam. It is fed by many regional and global actors, headed by global Zionism and the crusaders. It does not target Sudan alone, as South Sudan is Islam's and Arabism's gate to Africa.⁷⁴

Similar discourse was employed by the movement's recently-appointed Supreme Guide, Mohammed Badi'. In October 2010 Badi' issued a newsletter entitled 'The Conspiracy against the Islamic World continues'. In the newsletter, Badi' described South Sudanese secession as 'the first step in the plan to revise the map of the Middle East'. The West, Badi' warned, wishes to gain control over Sudan's oil and Egypt's water resources. He then added that 'this started in Sudan because it is the largest Arab state, extending to the heart of Africa. It has been a historical strategic Arab and Islamic passage into Africa... This is in order to set a bulwark between the Arab and Islamic world and the African people'.⁷⁵ In another case, a group of '*ulama* (religious scholars) pleaded the 'Arab people and rulers to stand shoulder to shoulder against Zionist schemes against Sudan... a beloved part of the Islamic world'.⁷⁶

But these were not just Qaradawi, Badi' and the '*ulama*, perceived as representing the MB's old guard or more conservative circles, who resorted to this sectarian discourse. Erian,

considered a representative of the middle-aged camp,⁷⁷ also employed this discourse amid the crisis. Encouraging a united front against the South Sudanese referendum, he wrote that ‘The secessionist state, instead of being a Sudanese bridge to the heart of Africa would become a buffer controlled by the churches and the WCC. This would prevent Islamic enlightenment from reaching those thirsty for faith’.⁷⁸ Emphasizing that the SPLM/A is backed by ‘the Zionist entity and the United States’, Erian warned that ‘the conspirators will not stop at tearing the rest of Sudan apart... they will move against Egypt’.⁷⁹ Shortly after, Erian lamented that ‘it is clear to anyone with eyes in his head that the United States and its allies, and especially the Zionist enemy, have planned a road map for Sudan for many years now, to create a state in the South’.⁸⁰ Similarly, Khaled Ouda, another member of the middle-aged generation, albeit speaking of national security, reverted to a religious discourse when he pleaded the Egyptian government to declare *jihad* in Sudan in order to ‘prevent the secession of South Sudan and any infringement of the Blue Nile’.⁸¹

In short then, the MB’s ideological outlook did not genuinely change. In fact, the South Sudan question seemed to have enjoyed some consensus among different circles within the movement, in a way other subjects did not. This consensus clearly emerged at the MB’s political campaign in 2011. The programme of the MB’s front party, *hizb al-hurriyya wa-l-‘adala* (Freedom and Justice Party, hereafter FJP), released in February 2011, discussed South Sudan as one of the key issues on the Egyptian agenda. The programme declared that ‘Restoring Egypt’s pioneering position in its Arabic and Islamic environments is our first priority.’ It then continued: ‘Egypt’s withdrawal from its African environment is the reason for many of the problems [facing Egypt], including that of the Nile Valley, South Sudan’s secession and the Darfur question’.⁸² Here, the South Sudan question was also bound with that of Palestine, as the other major concern facing Egypt.⁸³

The FJP's electoral victory in November 2011 and the election of the party's candidate, Mohammed Morsi, for presidency seemingly provided the MB with the opportunity to implement its plans, domestically and internationally. In reality the new government failed to alter the previous regime's policies. The MB's hostility toward peace with Israel and resentment toward American presence in the Middle East persisted. The new government strengthened its ties with the Hamas government in Gaza and Morsi refrained from travelling to Washington and meet President Barack Obama. But this stopped with these gestures and the FJP government avoided annulling Camp David or downgrading Egypt's formal cooperation with Washington. This was also the case with South Sudan. The MB did not change its line toward South Sudan. During the preparation for the elections, when asked in an interview on FJP's position on the subject, Erian affirmed that 'We need a united Sudan, a safe Sudan, a secure Sudan for all Sudanese in Darfur and in east and in south... We support Sudan for keeping security because it is a matter of national interest for us'.⁸⁴ Yet, in this case as well Morsi did not alter the previous regime's policy. In 2013 Morsi held a meeting with the South Sudanese President, Salva Kiir Mayardit, during the African Summit in Addis Ababa. In this meeting Morsi committed to continue the cooperation between Egypt and South Sudan on the issues of electricity, health and education.⁸⁵ Morsi's appointed Prime Minister, Hesham Kandil, also travelled to South Sudan to discuss water issues.⁸⁶ It is interesting to note here that Morsi, while holding an official visit to Khartoum in April 2013, did not continue to Juba. This in contrast to Hosni Mubarak, who in 2008 supplemented his visit to Khartoum with an official visit to South Sudan, where he convened with Kiir.

While at first sight these policies seem to support the MB's moderation hypothesis, in practice this is not the case. The MB simply did not have the opportunity to revise Egypt's foreign policy. Upon coming to power, the MB concentrated its resources on domestic affairs, and especially constitutional reforms. As Elizabeth Iskander Monier and Annette Ranko argue,

‘because the MB was consumed with managing the domestic political transition, it did not have the capacity to make any significant moves on the foreign-policy level either’.⁸⁷ Moreover, according to Ewan Stein, ‘The 25 January 2011 “revolution” had by no means dislodged the incumbent regime. The security forces, large parts of the bureaucracy, judiciary and media, and of course the military all remained in place and influential’.⁸⁸ This left the new government with the option of using these existing institutions and immerse itself in domestic politics. Consequently, in the field of foreign policy, ‘the Brotherhood continued to behave like a loyal opposition movement despite having won both parliamentary and presidential elections’.⁸⁹

A military coup in July 2013 removed Morsi from power and suspended the FJP-dominated parliament. One may suggest that had Morsi and the FJP government remained in power, the minor gestures mentioned above would have paved the way to a more substantial change in the MB’s stand on international affairs. This, however, remains a counterfactual. Given the evidences, Morsi’s conduct did not indicate an alteration of his movement’s traditional stances. Some hint into the MB’s foreign policy agenda is provided by *Nafidhat Misr* (Egypt’s Window), another website addressing the younger generation of MB supporters; a piece in 2014 suggested that South Sudanese secession was a prelude to Washington’s scheme to establish a Coptic state in Alexandria.⁹⁰

Conclusion

It is necessary to stress again that this article does not deny that the MB has gone through a transformation over the years. It does question the extent to which we could actually describe this as moderation. If we go back to the definitions of moderation offered by Schwedler, Olson and Lynch, we can isolate two intertwined important elements: willingness to reconsider traditional stances against a changing reality, and to engage in some dialogue with other actors.

These elements recur implicitly in the MB's definition of moderation. The recognition of state institutions and the electoral process as the mechanisms leading to change was a far cry from the agenda that guided the MB not too long ago. Yet, recent works have demonstrated that the MB's readiness to change its political conduct in Egypt has been far from linear, and that its achievements could at best be considered as relative to the increasingly conservative Egyptian society. The dissonance between the moderation hypothesis advanced by the MB and some observers and the MB's actions on the ground becomes even more apparent in foreign policy issues. The MB's approach to the South Sudan question reflects this vividly. For decades the MB remained intransigent in its opposition to South Sudanese secession, even when conditions changed. The change of discourse did not indicate a policy shift; in fact, even this transformation remained limited. Albeit the so-called reforms in the movement, the MB's stand on the South Sudan subject was shaped by its religious thinking.

At the time of writing this article, the MB is once again persecuted by the Egyptian authorities. After a brief spell in power, in which the FJP-led government generally failed in launching any major reform, the MB leaders are now standing for trial, facing possible death sentences. One may question the logic of investigating the MB's policies, let alone its agenda on international affairs, at this point. My reply would be that even in its depleted state, the MB's ideology remains influential, appealing to wide segments of Egyptian and Middle Eastern populations. The MB had been oppressed in the past and resurrected. It may recuperate, in one way or another. But even if it does not, the MB's ideas and ideology will not simply evaporate. They are bound to remain influential. Therefore, studying them continues to be a priority for anyone who studies regional geopolitics. The study of the movement's stand on the South Sudan question provides us with a convenient case for challenging some popular conventions about the MB's ideology.

Beyond its main goal, the article paves the way to further investigation. Not much has been written so far on the MB's stands on international affairs. Even more so, very little has been written on the link between the MB's core mission of spreading its model of governance and its approach to foreign policy issues. Even less has been written on the MB's views on its role in Sub-Saharan Africa, which, this article demonstrated, actually became a recurring theme in the MB's political thought. This work could serve as a useful starting point for future research on these subjects.

¹ Hereafter MB refers to the Egyptian branch, unless stated otherwise. I have consciously chosen not to examine the Sudanese MB's policies on the South Sudan question, beyond aspects relevant for the understanding of the Egyptian MB's policies. Although the Sudanese MB was inspired by its Egyptian counterpart, this was an independent political movement with only loose ties to Egypt. For a good study of the subject see Abdelwahab El-Affendi, "Discovering the South: Sudanese dilemmas for Islam in Africa", *African Affairs* 89:356, 1990, pp. 371-389.

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